

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, February 28, 2023
Virtually

EAC members present – B. Vitale, S. Bach, C. Curran-Myers, J. Cole, D. Beane, A. Sellers

Others present – S. Smith, B. Ayers-Fisher, J. Slusser, C. Sullivan, R. Bradley, F. Freytiz

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Curran-Myers, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the January 24, 2023 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Ms. Ayers-Fisher announced the following upcoming events:

- Earth Day and the Great American Clean-Up will be held on April 22 at City Park. The Great American Clean-Up will begin at 8 am and Earth Day will begin at noon.

Ms. Bach questioned if the EAC will have a table at Earth Day. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that they will. She stated that the group can discuss details at the March meeting.

- Manufacturer's Resource Roundtable will be held on April 6 at Berks Nature. The Roundtable will provide information for small businesses to become more sustainable.
- PA DEP will be presenting the PA Climate Action Plan in Reading on April 11 at 10:30 am at Berks Nature
- A clean-up on Mt. Penn will occur on March 4 at 9 am. Participants should meet at the 3rd overlook.

Mr. Thompson connected to the meeting at this time.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that these clean-ups are very worthwhile. She stated that there is a constant need for clean-up on the mountain. She stated that she is unable to attend.

- A hike and tree planting is tentatively scheduled for March 18 at the Mt. Penn overlooks. This is a joint project with the RACC Environmental Club and is dependent on the weather and the tree delivery.
- The Delaware Rivershed Water Congress will be held on March 25. The restoration of the Angelica Creek will be discussed.

Ms. Sellers stated that Dr. Ozgood is an expert on wetland monitoring. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that he has 25 years of data on the Angelica Creek and he is also assisting with Bernhart's.

WWTP AUDIT RESULTS

Ms. Ayers-Fishers requested that this topic be delayed to the March meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need to review the topics listed under the Project Updates heading on the agenda to determine if they are all still needed.

STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Bradley stated that he and Ms. Ayers-Fisher attended the Keep America Beautiful Conference in Washington, DC. He stated that the conference was very good and he has many ideas to bring to Reading. He stated that the Keep Reading Beautiful campaign will be restarted and that he is currently forming a steering committee. He stated that Reading is eligible for federal grants.

Mr. Bradley stated that he is currently working with the County to install ashtrays in their outdoor employee smoking area. He stated that there is quite a lot of cigarette butt litter in the area. He stated that the ashtrays will be installed once he has permission from the County. He stated that the cigarette butts can then be shipped to Keep America Beautiful and the City will receive funding. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the funding is provided by TerraCycle.

Mr. Bradley stated that he learned a lot at the conference. He stated that he also will be implementing ideas that are successful in other states.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned the number of blocks that have been adopted. Mr. Bradley stated that there are 123 participants. He stated that he has been meeting with local churches to request they adopt their blocks. He stated that three churches have responded positively.

Mr. Vitale questioned if 123 blocks have been adopted. Mr. Bradley stated that 69 blocks have been adopted by 26 businesses, 18 non-profit organizations and 1 school. He stated that litter free zones are also being established around City school buildings.

Mr. Vitale questioned the tree survey. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that EAC members are welcome to serve on this steering committee. She stated that Ms. Gockley from the Shade Tree Commission will also be a member of the steering committee. She stated that the tree survey will also help the City maintain its trees and this project will become part of the tree equity initiative.

Ms. Sellers questioned how Mr. Bradley publicizes the Adopt-A-Block program. Mr. Bradley stated that he has appeared on the radio and BCTV and that current participants refer others to him.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that the EAC interns also help with publicizing the program. Mr. Bradley stated that the City's community gardens have also been adopted.

Ms. Sellers questioned if there is signage for the blocks. Mr. Bradley stated that there is signage. He stated that the sign is posted in the block and the group's name is included. He stated that downtown businesses who are participating have signs for their windows. He stated that if there is no clean-up performed by the group, he removes the signage.

Ms. Sellers questioned Mr. Bradley's title. Mr. Bradley stated that he is the Clean City Coordinator.

Via the chat feature, Ms. Smith questioned if the clean-up includes cleaning the storm sewer grates. Mr. Bradley stated that this is included. He stated that there is also a special request to clean the sewer grates both before and after storms. He stated that storm sewer cleaning will be a focus of summer youth employees. He stated that they will clean grates between Laurel St and Windsor St.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that it is noticeable when the grates are cleaned. She stated that many residents clean the grates as good citizens.

Mr. Beane described the problems with litter on Mineral Spring Rd and stated that he is consistently cleaning the grate in front of his home. He noted the need to educate people that these are not trash receptacles.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she and Mr. Harrity have arranged for advertising on six BARTA bus shelters. She stated that Mr. DuGuay has designed an “Only Rain Down the Drain” ad. She stated that messages will also appear on the electronic sign on the Penn St Bridge.

Ms. Sellers stated that our area drains to the Chesapeake Bay. She stated that there are a few signs on the PA Turnpike with this message. She noted the need to educate residents about the size of this watershed. She also noted the need for signs indicating that Reading’s storm drains go directly into the Schuylkill River.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher expressed the belief that the Delaware River Basin is severely underfunded. She stated that there is some signage and agreed that more is needed. She stated that she has badges for the storm drains and that they will be installed by the summer youth.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that PennDOT does not want to install signage and will not allow them. She stated that it may be time to try again but that she was unsuccessful when she was at DEP.

PROJECT UPDATES

- Communications Committee

Mr. Vitale stated that two interns have been contracted and Ms. Sullivan is a bonus. He stated that the Committee is currently meeting every two weeks.

Mr. Vitale stated that the Committee participated in RACC’s Environmental Awareness Week with a table and discussed careers in sustainability. He stated that a brochure was drafted along with posters on climate change. He stated that the work is organized and is moving forward nicely. He thanked Ms. Slusser for keeping everyone focused.

Mr. Vitale stated that the brochure content will be fine-tuned and then provided to a graphic designer. He stated that information about the Sustainable Six will be

compiled and expressed the belief that the EAC will have a great presence at Earth Day. He stated that the poster helped to begin compiling resident concerns about climate change. He stated that many have voiced concern about public health in relation to climate change. He stated that all the written information will be translated into Spanish.

Mr. Vitale stated that the group intends to continue working with the Library Book Club and the garden at Goggleworks. He stated that other potential partners are being considered to host the listening sessions. He stated that details about access to social media are also being worked on.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the difficulty accessing the City's social media without a Communications Coordinator. Mr. Vitale stated that Tik Tok is also being discussed. He noted the need to follow the City's policies for social media.

Ms. Sellers questioned if the information that she was to provide on green infrastructure is still needed. Mr. Vitale stated that it is needed.

Ms. Sellers suggested that this information coordinate with the language on the signage.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Smith is working with staff regarding social media needs. He stated that there will be much content to share.

Ms. Sellers stated that she will follow up with the Philadelphia Water Department for permission to use their graphics on social media and the EAC's webpage.

Mr. Vitale suggested using infographics for easier understanding. He stated that the map is still in the development stages.

REORGANIZATION

Mr. Beane stated that reorganization usually occurs in January. He noted the need for a Chair and Vice Chair for 2023.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there was some discussion at the January meeting but that reorganization was postponed to February. She stated that Ms. Bach is willing to serve as Vice Chair in 2023 and Chair in 2024. She stated that she is willing to serve as Chair in 2023 to mentor Ms. Bach. She recommended that Mr.

Cole and Mr. Thompson also serve in leadership positions after they have been involved a bit longer.

Ms. Sellers moved, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to appoint Ms. Curran-Myers as Chair and Ms. Bach as Vice Chair. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Bach stated that she is excited to serve.

Mr. Beane stated that he is willing to chair meetings if necessary.

Ms. Sellers disconnected from the meeting at this time.

PROJECT UPDATES (CONTINUED)

- Climate Action Plan

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that the Plan is being updated as projects move forward. She stated that the new greenhouse gas metrics provided by Ms. Sullivan will also be added. She stated that the City's tree equity score is also being worked on. She noted her hope that community outreach would begin in June. She stated that the City's Active Transportation Plan and potential rail service will be added to the Mobility section. She stated that RAWA is working on water equity which will be included when it is complete.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Slusser has agreed to work with the EAC through the summer and will assist with community outreach.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that there is an event at Riverfront Park on June 3. She stated that this is a tabling opportunity and she will have additional information at upcoming meetings. She noted her hope to have City Council review the draft plan in September.

- Non-Use Aquifer Designation

Mr. Beane stated that a new plan is needed for this work. He stated that Andy Fetterman has left Liberty Environmental and is now working for Berks Nature. He stated that if Reading does not have this designation there is specific testing which needs to occur before redevelopment can begin. He stated that the City is on a public water supply but still needs to have the designation.

Mr. Beane stated that Lancaster has the designation and it has made development much easier. He stated that he is working with Jim Cinelli at Liberty

Environmental to ensure this project moves forward using their summer interns. He stated that the Chamber is very interested in moving this forward.

- Urban Agriculture

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the work group has been reconvened. She stated that the Conservation District grant is expiring and they have requested the EAC submit a letter of support as they submit a new application. She stated that she has begun drafting the letter.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the current plan is to develop a green space for education and outreach purposes. She stated that the focus will be on how to grow your own food. She expressed the belief that this is an excellent project and is not duplicative of other projects.

Motion was made by Mr. Vitale, seconded by Ms. Curran-Myers, to send a letter of support as part of the grant application. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Beane expressed the belief that this is a great initiative.

- Code Review Committee

Mr. Vitale stated that the Committee met one time and there was consensus to wait to review the City's Building Codes until after they have adopted the most recent ICC / UCC Codes because some items may already be incorporated. He stated that additional sustainable and green building construction are being included with each new Code adoption.

Mr. Beane suggested adding a new category to the agenda "Long-Term Projects" and moving this topic to the new heading.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and expressed the belief that several other topics will be moved.

- Invasive Plant / Noxious Weed Education

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has no report. She stated that walks in the Hessian Camp / Pendora Park area and on Mt. Penn will be planned in the spring.

Mr. Beane stated that the deer herd is removing much invasive ivy.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested that a work day also be included. She stated that there is much honeysuckle that needs to be removed from Mineral Spring Park.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Japanese Knotweed needs to be removed from Mt. Penn near the trail entrance.

- Storm Water / MS4 Issues

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that she and Mr. Bachman will be making a presentation to PSATS on a program to train volunteers to perform outfall inspections.

- Lead Abatement Program

Mr. Beane suggested that this topic be moved into the long term category. He requested a presentation in the spring.

- BCTV Program

Mr. Beane stated that he is unable to continue coordinating the program. He requested that new members consider working on this project. He stated that the EAC has a 30 minute program on BCTV at 6:30 pm on the 3rd Thursday every other month. He stated that this is a great educational opportunity and many new members have worked on the program. He stated that programs are pre-taped.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that the interns may be able to provide programming.

Mr. Beane stated that he will coordinate with BCTV during the transition.

Mr. Vitale questioned what is currently running in that timeslot. Mr. Beane expressed the belief that BCTV is running old programs.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned when the next program needs to be prepared. Mr. Beane stated that he believes it would be March. He stated that he will confirm with BCTV.

Mr. Bradley stated that he would be willing to host the program.

Mr. Vitale questioned if the EAC has a program sponsor. Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that City programs use MAC funding.

Mr. Bradley stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher has been encouraging him to take a bigger lead and grow his position.

Mr. Vitale noted the need for the EAC to approve the topics. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed. She encouraged Mr. Bradley to schedule EAC members as program guests.

Ms. Slusser questioned if the Communications Committee was meeting on March 7. Mr. Vitale stated that it is meeting on March 7 at 10 am.

- Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAs)

Mr. Beane requested that this topic be moved to the long term list.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed and noted that PA has new PFA regulations.

- Zero Waste Plan

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Public Works needs to draft the Plan.

Mr. Beane requested that this topic be moved to the long term list.

- Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Beane requested that this topic be moved to the long term list.

- City-owned Dams

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that a community meeting on Bernhart's still needs to be scheduled. She stated that a landscape architect student from Muhlenberg Township is drafting a park design as his capstone project. She stated that the draft design could be used as a visual aid at the community meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- Update EAC Webpage

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that the webpage be reviewed by members for ideas about how to reorganize it. She expressed the belief that the page appears cluttered.

Ms. Slusser disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Curran-Myers requested that the review be deferred to the March meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

- Brownfields Database

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the City has subscribed to ERIS for Phase 1 environmental assessment for redevelopment. She stated that the system includes much information but does not include Act 2 information for land restrictions or requirements. She stated that this information is critical when a change of land use is requested and that ERIS does not address the EAC's original concerns.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that Act 2 information is a deed restriction. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the restriction only appears if the deed restriction is registered.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher stated that ERIS can perform Act 2 searches but must know where to look.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that DEP is required to inform the municipality about Act 2 restrictions. She stated that the City does not have a central location where this information is filed and can be researched.

Mr. Beane agreed and stated that there are huge issues when the information cannot be located.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this information should be public and the EAC knows that local activists care about this information. She stated that this is a big issue and wants to address it.

Ms. Smith stated that the City Clerk's office receives the information now but needs to understand how to handle the information. She stated that she is unsure who received the notice in the past or how to find past notices.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if the notices can be provided by DEP or the County. Mr. Beane stated that the County does not have this information.

Mr. Vitale expressed the belief that DEP should have the information since they send notice to the municipality. He suggested forming a subcommittee to work on this project.

Ms. Ayers-Fisher suggested including staff from the Planning and Zoning Offices.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she will serve. She suggested that the Committee be comprised of herself, Mr. Beane, Ms. Smith, and Ms. Davis. She noted the need for this information to be available to residents and developers.

Mr. Vitale questioned how this is handled in other cities. He suggested inviting a DEP rep or one of the City's legislators to attend the meetings.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she and Mr. Beane will do some preliminary research and make a report at the committee meeting.

Mr. Vitale questioned who is now keeping track of the notices. Mr. Beane stated that the notices are now received by Ms. Smith. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she has also received them in the past.

Mr. Thompson disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Beane noted the need for this committee to make a recommendation to the full EAC. Ms. Curran-Myers agreed.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 28 at noon via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk